



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## EARLY HISTORY OF SIGMA XI

In estimating the extent of progress of Sigma Xi from the time of its founding in 1886 to the present, much is to be gained by a careful study of the early history of the Society, particularly during the period of its inception. The QUARTER CENTURY RECORD AND HISTORY contains an extended account of this early period, but the following very interesting extract from a letter written in May, 1917, by Wm. H. Riley, of the class of 1886, Cornell University, and one of the founders and charter members of the Alpha Chapter, gives some hitherto unpublished information:

"You asked me to tell you about Sigma Xi. Well it has been so long ago that I have forgotten most of the details but I will tell you as much as I can remember. During my last three years in Cornell, I ate with a bunch of boys who were mostly art students and most of them very good students. Every spring, some of these boys won their Phi Beta Kappa keys and of course these were the occasions of congratulations and discussions. In the spring of 1886 two of my best friends received their keys, which started me to thinking that there should be some such honor bestowed on the scientific students who had done good work. I discussed the question with W. A. Day, my chum, an engineering student, and we grew very enthusiastic over it. At this time there was an instructor in Sibley College, Mr. Frank Van Vleck, with whom we were very intimate. He was a graduate of Stevens Institute and was brought to Cornell by Dr. Thurston when he came from Stevens. We mentioned the subject to Mr. Van Vleck one evening while sitting under the trees on the corner of Factory (now Stewart) Avenue and State Street, in front of our boarding house; he was much taken with the scheme and thought it should be worked up immediately. This was about the first of May. From that time until commencement we often held meetings, the three of us, under the trees or walking down town. Mr. Van Vleck consulted the faculty and Mr. Day, myself, and the boys. Everybody thought it was a good scheme, but as graduation was so near we could not get them aroused. The week before commencement we had a meeting and decided to stay a while after the close of college and work the matter up, but I was called home directly after commencement. Mr. Day and Van Vleck stayed until they had everything planned out. We had considerable correspondence during the summer but it has all been mislaid. Mr.

Van Vleck presented his scheme in the fall of 1886 and a society was formed. This is all I know about Sigma Xi."

In view of the interest which attaches to personal accounts of this kind, might it not be advisable to take some steps to secure more of such information from all of those who were instrumental in establishing the Society.

#### AN APPEAL FOR DATA

The preceding, very interesting note furnished by one of our enthusiastic members who recognized the value of such a personal record of the early days, suggests how little we really know of the details of the movement that led to the organization of the Sigma Xi Society. The few men who among the founders have written of those times in which the plan was being worked out, have in their accounts sketched the events only in bold outline and our minds ask naturally that the rest of the picture be filled in. The *QUARTER CENTURY RECORD AND HISTORY* includes in the section on the foundation of the order all that could then be ascertained, but many gaps appear in the record. There must be further interesting details if only they could be dug up. Here is a field in which volunteer assistance is much needed, for numbers will spell success.

It is now thirty two years since the movement was inaugurated and thirty one since Sigma Xi was actually founded. The men who were then college boys have all of them passed the crest of the hill and are now sedate men of affairs. No doubt they have forgotten much of college days but our discussion and appeals for help may open the old choked up channels of memory and permit some recollections of those days of planning to filter thru. Old college scrap books may disclose programs of meetings, announcements of conferences or initiations, or records clipped from college papers that will throw new light on the dim twilight of the dawn of Sigma Xi.

We should not forget that among the intimates and associates of the founders were no doubt those who knew of the movement tho they were not within the circle because their work lay in other fields of university activity. Such men could contribute much to our information of those times if we could ascertain who they were and could refresh the memories that years have rendered vague and shadowy. So far as printed records go no associate of the group

that organized Sigma Xi has given form to any impressions these men made upon their fellows in the university by reason of the vision they had. It may well have been that the idea appeared to outsiders then too trivial or too doubtful in real value as it must have seemed too unlikely to succeed to justify serious attention; and so all outside impressions of the period have vanished in so far at least as they concern the conception and birth of the new organization. It should be remembered that of the four chapters known to have been established in the year after the society was founded at Cornell two died almost at birth, and there seem to have been other chapters that were still born and never won a name or place in history. Yet despite this lack of outlook for the future someone may still have played the part of Boswell for the farsighted Dr. Johnsons of the Sigma Xi circle and be even now waiting for the right appeal to bring out his stories of the founders and the things they did to make Sigma Xi a reality. Will not every one who stands in personal touch with any early member of Sigma Xi or with any Cornell man of the years in which our organization was conceived and brought forth, join in the effort to secure some further data on the men concerned, the work they did, and the impressions they and their work left on those with whom they were associated.

The appeal is for immediate action; the need is urgent. Already some of those men have gone from us and before many years have passed it will be impossible to secure what may now be available for the mere asking. This appeal goes out first of all to Cornell men of 1885, 1886, and 1887, and to their friends and associates then and today who have an interest in Sigma Xi. It goes also to the students and faculty at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy) and at Union College where in 1887 the second and fourth chapters were established and where men must have been closely in touch with the founders in the parent Cornell chapter.

Incidentally in closing attention may be directed to the fact that no one has yet written even a sketch of the two defunct chapters at Rutgers and Stevens Institute concerning which there is known to have been extensive correspondence. Some of it may yet be in existence that will reflect an interesting light on the aims and ideals of the men who were seeking to draw others under the influence of the new organization for mutual benefit. Last of all there still remains the riddle of the missing chapter letters. Who were the men or colleges to which the missing Gamma, Epsilon, and Eta has been assigned?